

governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, or State governments; and

(G) identify whether written program goals are available for each applicable program.

(c) RECOMMENDATIONS.—Not later than January 1, 2017, the Secretary, in consultation with the agency heads described in clauses (ii) through (xi) of subsection (a)(2)(B), shall submit to Congress a report that includes—

(1) a recommendation of whether any applicable program should be eliminated or consolidated, including any legislative changes that would be necessary to eliminate or consolidate applicable programs; and

(2) methods to improve the applicable programs by establishing program goals or increasing collaboration to reduce any potential overlap or duplication, taking into account—

(A) the 2011 report of the Government Accountability Office entitled “Federal Initiatives for the Nonfederal Sector Could Benefit from More Interagency Collaboration”; and

(B) the report of the Government Accountability Office entitled “2012 Annual Report: Opportunities to Reduce Duplication, Overlap and Fragmentation, Achieve Savings, and Enhance Revenue”.

(d) ANALYSES.—Not later than January 1, 2017, the Secretary, in consultation with the agency heads described in clauses (ii) through (xi) of subsection (a)(2)(B), shall identify—

(1) which applicable programs were specifically authorized by Congress; and

(2) which applicable programs are carried out solely under the discretionary authority of the Secretary or any agency head described in clauses (ii) through (xi) of subsection (a)(2)(B).

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now vote on these amendments en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on these amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, if I could just say, I so appreciate our colleagues working in such a bipartisan fashion to work through these eight amendments and set votes for these amendments tomorrow. We are making good progress on this legislation. I hope our colleagues will give attention to these matters so tomorrow we can move further on some more votes to clear up the remaining issues before us on this bill.

I appreciate all our colleagues working together in earnest and the chair of the committee to make sure we have made this progress so far today. Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Hearing no further debate, the question is on agreeing to the amendments en bloc.

The amendments (Nos. 2970, 2989, 2991, 3119, 3019, 3066, 3137, and 3056, as modified) were agreed to en bloc.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Sen-

ate proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 458.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Ricardo A. Aguilera, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Air Force.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I know of no further debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there any further debate?

Hearing none, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Aguilera nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ANNIVERSARY OF THE LILLY LEDBETTER FAIR PAY ACT

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the anniversary of the signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.

Lilly Ledbetter is an inspiring woman and a courageous trailblazer. She fought the system in her workplace and the courtroom. She was a longstanding and loyal employee at the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company for 19 years. But then she found out that Goodyear thought she was worth less than her male counterparts. A jury found Goodyear owed her almost \$400,000 in backpay, but the Supreme Court said that she was too late. When Justice Ginsburg read her dissent from the bench, she called for Congress to fix it, so we went to work.

It has been over 7 years since we passed this historic legislation. I was so proud to lead the charge in the Senate to keep the courthouse doors open to sue for discrimination. This wasn't an easy road. When we lost the first

vote on this bill, I called upon the women in the Senate and across America to put their lipstick on, square their shoulders, and suit up to fight for an American revolution.

We did just that, and the Lilly Ledbetter Act became the first bill that President Obama signed into law in 2009.

Passing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was a big accomplishment—but our work is far from done. We need to finish what we started by passing the Paycheck Fairness Act. The Lilly Ledbetter Act kept the courthouse door open, but the Paycheck Fairness Act will make it more difficult to discriminate in the first place.

Women are tired of being paid crumbs. Women still only make 79 cents for every dollar a man makes, and it is even worse for women of color—African-American women earn 62 cents on the dollar, and Hispanic women earn 54 cents. By retirement, the average woman loses \$431,000 to the pay gap. This affects Social Security, pensions, and retirement security. Everybody says, “Oh you’ve come a long way,” but women have only gained 20 cents in 50 years.

We will not take no for an answer. We will continue to demand equal pay for all. We are going to change the Federal law books, so women get change in their family checkbooks.

NATIONAL SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, as National School Choice Week came to a close last week, I want to highlight the important role school choice plays in our education system in Arkansas and across the country.

I am the proud graduate of Arkansas's public schools and the son of a public school teacher and principal. Throughout my life, I was blessed with wonderful parents, teachers, and coaches who taught the skills, knowledge, and values needed for success in the workforce. Unfortunately, not all children have the same experience.

Dardanelle High School was the right choice for me, but the local public school isn't always the right fit for everyone. Too many children aren't receiving the attention or education they deserve. This is especially true in areas with poor performing schools. But it is not always about the quality of education; sometimes local schools cannot make adequate accommodations for a child's religious beliefs or personal needs. Quite simply, one size fits all isn't the key to success for education.

That is why I believe in school choice.

Parents—not politicians and bureaucrats—know what is best for their children. We should empower them and ensure they have access to alternatives to the traditional public system. This includes home schooling, charter schools, and private and religious schools. That way, every child will receive the type of education that best fits their learning style.

To countless families across America, school choice means accessing the best possible education for their children. By providing school choice, we can promote innovation in our schools, provide more personalized education for our children, and improve racial and economic disparities in educational outcomes.

I am pleased to have celebrated National School Choice Week and the improvements that school choice has brought to our country.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VERMONT ESSAY FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD copies of some of the finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the sixth annual "What is the State of the Union" essay contest conducted by my office. These finalists were selected from nearly 800 entries.

The material follows:

SARA MANFREDI, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL
(FINALIST)

Before I begin this address, I would like to take a moment to thank all of you for being here today. But, there are issues our country must conquer in order to make our home safer, as well as more equal, for both ourselves, and the generations to come.

In recent years, it has come to attention of our government that there have been over 400,000 untested rape kits stuck in backlog all around the country. One precinct held over 5,000 in backlog, all untested, most cases left without any trial. How dare we do this to those hundreds upon thousands of victims? Who are we to deny them any sense of safety or justice? These facts have done nothing more than allow rapists to get out of any sort of punishment. This horrid trend must be stopped, and can only be stopped if this government takes immediate action. The issue with this is that many of these local jurisdictions do not have the money to process these kits, because of the innate lack of funding for said kits to be processed. I am willing to offer more funding through federal grants to these precincts, so these long backlogs can finally be tested, and the victims of these crimes can get the justice they deserve. To ensure this money is used to test these rape kits, I will work with Congress to pass a law into action that will give precincts a time constraint in which they must have these kits tested, most likely within 72 hours. By having this deadline set into place, as well as the money to fund said testing, this national backlog will gradually dwindle down. This justice is owed to the survivors of these vicious assaults.

Some victims, however, cannot be given the justice they deserve. A recent influx of mass shootings have killed 380 American citizens, and left hundreds of families in mourning over their lost loved ones. I am not going to say that any one of the perpetrators of the 294 mass shootings in the past year killed because they were lonely, lost outsiders. These killers were not in the right mind, no, but mental health is not to blame. What is to blame is American gun laws. These men were able to commit these heinous crimes because of how accessible guns are in this country. How do we stop this? We restrict and complicate. If we are to ensure the safety of the American public, we

must ensure that only those who are specifically trained to use a gun, those who are able to handle one and not go awry are allowed to carry one. Police officers and military personnel should be the only ones to be able to carry handguns at all times for their jobs. Rifles shall be heavily restricted as well, only distributed to those who undergo a complicated vetting process, as to ensure that they will not become the next person to kill innocent bystanders. I just want the American public to be safe. I do not want any more men, women, and children to be victims of these preventable crimes. I only wish the best for us. Thank you.

WILLIAM MARTIN, MOUNT ABRAHAM UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The United States is being cornered by problems, of all shapes and magnitude, from every direction. These issues need more attention and they will not be solved unless action is taken against them. Many of these situations will only get worse the longer we put them off. There are a variety of problems ranging from climate change to healthcare and we should be looking for a solution for all of them. The three issues that the U.S. should put most of its focus on, however, is the threat from ISIS, the price of higher education, and the cases of racism, especially those in police shootings.

The United States should spend more money to prevent ISIS from growing and causing more damage, because ISIS is a danger to the U.S., as well as other countries around the world and their citizens. Terrorism could also continue for a lot longer if we do not stop it soon. Terrorism really came onto the world stage after September 11, 2001. In a single day, a small group of people managed to kill thousands. Even before this, al-Qaeda truly started in the 1990s. This shows how long these groups have managed to continue, despite our efforts, which means we need to do more. Not only do we need to get rid of the organizations like ISIS that are here now, but we have to provide a stable system to make sure these types of groups don't return, or we could risk another disaster. ISIS will actually pay foreign fighters \$1,000 a month, which is how they get many of their recruits. Unfortunately, ISIS has a wide spread with connections in many places. This is a reason why it is hard to eradicate them, but also shows that we need to invest more into it if we want to get it done. The U.S. is however, already spending \$40 billion on fighting ISIS annually. This is a large sum of money, but of the \$1.1 trillion that the U.S. had for discretionary spending in 2015, it is only about 3.6 percent. The U.S. has a responsibility to help with the fight against ISIS, and the government should spend more money to disrupt this organization because they are a threat to everyone, everywhere, and will not go away unless we make them.

The U.S. should also spend more money on education, to make college more accessible to the average student, because it is important for getting good jobs and it costs far too much now. The average cost to go to a private college is \$32,405 which deters a lot of students who can't afford that price for four years. Since this price is so high, and those who can't afford it simply can't go, it leaves many without the education needed for higher paying jobs. This number is far too high. This even gives some doubt about getting their degrees, simply from the fear of debt. It is necessary to get a high paying job to be able to happily provide for a family, however the cost to get there is damaging, which is why the government has to step in. If the government did decide to make public college tuition free, it would cost \$62.6 billion. This cost may be high, but it's not even what

is needed. There simply needs to be more spent on making it more affordable. Also, theoretically, if the government needed to raise taxes to make tuition affordable, and nearly everyone had gone to college and had a high paying job, then after a couple years they could raise taxes without too much effect. The U.S. needs to make college easier for everyone and make it more affordable, because it costs far too much and could help citizens live an easier life with more money.

The U.S. government needs to take more action against racial events because they defy the constitutional values of the United States and these problems only get worse when left unsolved. The U.S. abolished slavery in 1865 under President Lincoln, but since then there has always been a separation of people of color because of the false thought of white superiority. We can see this in the way black people were treated in the 20th century, in how they were allowed little compared to those who were white. This shows a deep root of racism in this country, and though we have been making efforts to reduce it more and more, it still seems to not be enough. A large racism topic that has been in the media for a while is the shooting and other abuse white cops have committed on people of color. One example is Michael Brown, a black 18 year old, who was fatally shot in 2014 by a white officer. After there was no conviction of Darren Wilson, the shooter, many cried out in outrage. The commotion that was caused from that killing, and others, caused massive amounts of damage in protests to both people and property. There needs to be a better way to deal with these situations, otherwise the outrage will continue. There is also a question raised by statistics like that only 13.2% of the U.S. population is black, and yet they make up 39.4% of the prison population, or that nearly 50% of hate crimes are about racism. These numbers show how we need to increase the involvement of the government in these events—we cannot just ignore the danger behind these statistics. On the other hand, all U.S. citizens have the same legal rights, no matter their gender, race, or religion. This fact however, may not be fully true, because though on paper it may say there is no discrimination, that does not mean that there aren't people who do discriminate based on race. The government needs to step in on this issue, and use their power to end it, because it is dangerous to all and defies our American morals.

The U.S. will find itself in trouble if solutions are not quickly found to ISIS, the price of higher education, and acts of racism. If action is not taken against ISIS to permanently disrupt them, the danger they cause for everyone will only increase and get worse. Similarly, if money is not put towards helping offset the cost of higher education, we could see more and more people who can't afford to get a degree that could get them a job they can live off of, which would increase the separation of the upper and middle class. Lastly, it is very important that the U.S. finds a solution to the acts of racism that cause only harm and anarchy. The U.S. will never become the true country it was meant to be, and the "American Dream" will be fiction for many, until the problems we face today are solved.

HADLEY MENK, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

All men are created equal. America was founded upon this fundamental belief, but today the meaning of these words has been lost.

Americans are not equal when some cannot afford healthcare, when a woman's power over her body is diminished, or when the pursuit of happiness is lost in the struggle to